

LBJ Got FBI Wiretap Data

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From May, 1966, to January, 1969, the FBI provided President Lyndon B. Johnson with biweekly reports on conversations by or about anti-Vietnam-war senators or congressmen overheard by the bureau agents wiretapping foreign embassies, according to information obtained by the Senate intelligence committee.

The practice of sending the White House the political by-product of such national security wiretaps continued in the Nixon administration, according to the same information.

The original LBJ request on

March 14, 1966, asked for whatever current material the FBI could develop on senators, congressmen and prominent citizens who opposed the war.

The embassy wiretaps, initially installed to gather national security information, were then screened for political material. The first report, sent one week later, covered conversations that were overheard from July 1, 1964, through March 17, 1966, according to the Senate committee's information.

On March 22, 1966, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover noted for his files that Johnson was "very pleased with the material." Additional reports

were prepared over the following weeks and in May, according to the Senate committee information, Hoover ordered the material to be supplied to the White House on a biweekly basis.

The material supplied to the White House dealt with conversations not only of members of Congress but also their staff aides.

According to a one-time Johnson aide, the former president would often speak of what he knew Sen. J.W. Fulbright (D-Ark.), then chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, had

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been saying to the Soviet ambassador.

Ex-Sen. Fulbright recalled this week that he always sent the State Department a report on his visits to the Soviet embassy "since they (the FBI) knew if you went anyway because they watch the people who come and go."

Fulbright said he had no idea that his phone conversations with the embassy also had been overheard and reported to the White House.

According to an FBI spokesman, the bureau policy today is to supply the White House with information from national security embassy taps only if it "refers to a threat to the President or a very significant internal security aspect."

Attorney General Edward H. Levi and the Senate committee are currently studying the question of what laws or regulations should govern distribution of by-product material gained from legally authorized FBI wiretaps.

The LBJ-requested program was, according to former bureau officials, the first time that a President had sought information for political use that was culled from what were otherwise legal FBI wiretaps.

In a normal year, some 50 taps would be in operation at embassies and other foreign government buildings in Washington under the national security program.

On July 27, 1970, according

to the Senate committee material, Nixon White House chief of staff H.R. Haldeman, through an aide, requested information similar to that which had been supplied to President Johnson. Two days later, the bureau supplied summaries of three and one-half years of overheard em-

bassy conversations relating to senators and congressmen beginning Jan. 1, 1967, and running through July, 1970.

On Aug. 4, 1970, according to the committee material, White House aide Tom Charles Huston wrote Hoover saying President Nixon was pleased with the report.

The Senate committee first learned of the Johnson request that brought the by-product of national security embassy taps last week when it received a summary of the operation from the Department of Justice.

That information had been supplied to the attorney general as part of a broader report from FBI Director Clarence Kelley on past FBI practices, according to committee aides.

The Kelley report included several other political intelligence operations requested by the Johnson White House. "Johnson," according to one former FBI official, "considered us his private investigative arm."

In 1966, White House aide Marvin Watson asked the FBI to monitor Fulbright's televised hearings on the Vietnam war and prepare memos that compared the

statements of Fulbright and Sen. Wayne Morse (D-Ore.) with positions of the Communist Party.

Johnson and his aides also expanded on past White House requests for name checks on individuals. Early in Johnson's term, a White House dinner guest was written up in the press as being the subject of a federal criminal investigation. Thereafter, all White House guests were the subjects of FBI name checks.

The practice was not limited to that, however. In early July, 1966, Morse put letters into the Congressional Record that supported his anti-Vietnam war position.

On July 12, 1966, according to a letter released by the Senate committee, then White House counsel Jake Jacobsen requested name checks on all the letter signers. Three days later, Hoover sent to the White House eleven memoranda concerning individual signers of the letters.

Name check requests on "governors, senators, executives heading big corporations" all flowed into the FBI during the Johnson years, according to former FBI officials.

Under FBI Director Kelley, a procedure has been established so that all requests from the White House flow to one FBI official and he must inform Kelley of each one.